

**MINUTES OF THE CLEAN ENERGY COMMISSION MEETING:
GLOUCESTER GREEN PUBLIC FORUM**

May 25, 2017

West Parish School, 10 Concord St., Gloucester

(These minutes were unanimously approved as amended at the meeting of October 25, 2017)

Attending

Commissioners: Candace Wheeler, chair, Linda Stout-Saunders, Linda Brayton, Paul McGeary.

Staff: Matt Coogan

Panelists: Calvin Cook, Action Inc.; Christina Rohrbacher, Homeworks Energy; Mike Salmon, HRM Home; Corey Marshall and Corey Ricci-Munn Energy Savers Home Performance

Guests: Susanne Altenburger, Patrice Bouch, Steve Wood, Susan Hoague.

Forum: The Gloucester Green initiative and MassSave program

Ms. Wheeler convened the forum at 6:38 p.m. She opened the discussion, noting that the city is working with the private group TownGreen 2025 to take steps help alleviate and prevent climate change and to promote renewable energy sources. She pointed to the "Gloucester Green" campaign, which is publicizing and facilitating ways to save energy and money. She said the purpose of the evening's forum was to show how easy it is for residents to take advantage of the MassSave energy audit and improvement program. She noted the cost of MassSave audits is paid for by an energy efficiency charge on everyone's utility bill. In addition to the free energy assessments, she noted, there are generous subsidies for work performed arising out of the assessment. She said the forum participants would explain how to take advantage of the program. She also noted that additional help, including no-cost assistance, is available for income-eligible persons and households through the community action program Action Inc.

Mr. Coogan then gave an overview of the city's efforts to reduce its carbon footprint to combat climate change. He said he wanted to make sure that everyone is aware of the program and noted that more information was available at the program website gloucestergreen.org. He said the site provides links to sign up for an energy assessment and that there are videos and other resources for homeowners and residents. He said the program would participate in many events throughout year, mentioning last month's Sustainability Fair at the O'Maley Innovation Middle School and a live radio broadcast scheduled for June 14 at the commissioning of the new pier at Maritime Gloucester and the completion of the harbor remediation program at Solomon Jacobs Park. He said the energy assessment effort was a year-long campaign and that if 1,400 home energy assessments are completed in Gloucester in 2017 National Grid would provide the city with a \$40,000 grant towards energy efficiency. He encouraged residents to tell their neighbors about the program. He noted that Gloucester residents were fortunate to have local companies to perform any work identified in the assessment.

Ms. Wheeler then introduced **Mr. Cook** to outline Action Inc.'s programs.

Mr. Cook said he was a "building performance specialist" whose job was to "save kilowatts, gallons and therms." He noted that his inspections first focused on health and safety issues like water infiltration and pest infestations. He said he also evaluated how a house's energy efficiency could be improved. He noted that when a house is "tightened" its "breathing pattern" changes. Improper ventilation could lead to mold infestation or other problems.

He said the program then does a complete analysis of home, including windows, doors, basement insulation etc. He said residents should always check with Action to see if they are eligible for its services.

Mr. Salmon identified himself as independent installation contractor for the MassSave. His company installs improvements and verifies that everything that should be there is there. The firm conducts a "blower door test" to measure efficiency and leakage and to ensure that minimum building airflow standards are met.

Mr. Marshall outlined the process of beginning an assessment. He said homeowners could call MassSave or independent service contractors affiliated with the program directly. He noted that his company could initiate audit process. He also said all work is subject to review and audit by CLEAResult, a firm retained by MassSave to administer and oversee the program.

Mr. Ricci-Munn noted that there were many subsidies available for work done resulting from a MassSave assessment. There are rebates and zero-interest loans available for heating, cooling and hot water

systems. He said his firm sees one of its key roles as educating the customer on issues and "shouldering the load of navigating the MassSave world." He said the average improvements cost around \$2,700 but with rebates and incentives the average cost to the consumer was about \$450.

He noted that rebates and incentives were even better for multi-family homes, where the property owner could get savings of up to 90 percent or \$3,000 per unit.

Mr. Marshall noted that if one tenant is eligible for assistance from Action, Inc., Action would cover the cost of improvements to that unit in its entirety.

Mr. Ricci-Munn noted that a tenant can also initiate a request for an audit, though in practice it is usually the property owner who does so..

Ms. Rohrbacher noted that her firm, Homeworks Energy, is a "Home Performance Contractor." As such, it works with the residential program to conduct assessments, but also does insulation installations as well. She noted they can recommend firms for heating and cooling system improvements. Although her firm does assessments, the homeowner can choose someone else to do the work if they prefer, she noted. "Our mission is to make energy efficiency simple implement from concept to completion," she said. The firm also provides help with applying for a HEAT loan (up to \$25,000 at zero interest for up to seven years) if the project or homeowner is eligible. She noted that as part of the inspection, a check is made for other issues that might affect the ability to weatherize the home, including the presence of knob-and-tube wiring, vermiculite and asbestos. There are subsidies available to help remediate some of these issues as well, she noted.

Ms. Wheeler asked if the assessment every had a down side.

Mr. Ricci-Munn said that it was important to realize that insulating and weatherizing a home changes the dynamics of home by making it tighter. A smaller volume of air is exchanged every hour. The blower door test verifies that the house still exchanges air at the minimum level required to ensure the health of occupants. **Ms. Rohrbacher** added the program had a great many "checks and balances," including the audits by the firm CLEAResult when the work is completed.

Ms. Wheeler asked how intrusive the improvements were. Did the homeowner have to vacate the house or empty the attic, for example?

Mr. Salmon said the average job is done in a day or less, and that inconvenience is minimal, with some dust from the attic installation being the most common. He did note that attics should be cleaned out to facilitate installation of insulation. **Ms. Rohrbacher** noted that her firm will remove and replace articles in the attic for a \$50 charge.

Ms. Wheeler asked what additional services were performed during the audit.

Ms. Rohrbacher said the assessment process includes installation of LED lightbulbs, low-flow shower heads, programmable thermostats and intelligent power strips--all at no cost to the consumer. **Mr. Coogan** reiterated that we have all already paid for the cost of the assessment in our utility bills, might as well do it. He said the assessment is very comprehensive, checking gas burners, propane burners and then providing the materials mentioned above. Finally, he said, the assessment provides a road map and priorities for improving the energy efficiency of a home

Mr. Cook said that Action has two additional programs. An appliance management program will replace inefficient refrigerators with newer ones at no cost. It also will provide free heating system upgrades for those who qualify.

Ms. Wheeler asked what programs were available to replace or improve inefficient heating systems.

Mr. Marshall said the homeowner may be eligible for up to a \$3,500 on a 30-year-old boiler plus the HEAT loan mentioned above. **Mr. Marshall** noted that a 20-year old boiler may be only 2 percent less efficient than a modern one. Replacing a boiler doesn't always make sense in terms of payback, he noted.

Ms. Wheeler asked the panelists to confirm that if an energy assessment is performed the homeowner is under no obligation to get the work done, which **Mr. Marshall** confirmed.

Ms. Stout-Saunders asked if consumers could shop around for the best pricing for improvements. **Mr. Marshall** said they could, but the prices and incentives were set by MassSave. **Ms. Rohrbacher** said the basic decision in selecting a contractor should be: who are you most comfortable with? She noted that "MassSave makes it easy, you don't have to shop around." And reminded the audience that all work is subject to auditing, either at the instance of CLEAResult or by a request from the homeowner.

Ms. Altenburger noted that she had done much of the work of insulating her home in 1998 and had realized dramatic savings in energy consumption. She encouraged everyone to go beyond the program minimums if they were able. **Mr. Ricci-Munn** said that there were additional subsidies for "deep energy retrofits" to make homes super efficient.

Ms. Rohrbacher observed that if a person is income eligible her firm would direct them to Action, Inc. She added that there is assistance for people with moderate incomes as well.

Ms. Brayton noted that people can also qualify for fuel assistance.

Mr. Cook added that consumers need to be aware of the various rates for energy and gas. Depending on income level, people may qualify for lower rates (R2 electric vs R1 and R3 gas vs. R4). He said people should always check their bill to make sure they are being billed at the proper rate. A family of 6, for example, can make up to \$85,000 per year and still qualify for reduced gas rate. **Ms. Wheeler** noted that both the city's Community Development Dept. and Action are good resources for people seeking to determine if they are eligible for fuel assistance or a lowered energy rate.

Mr. Coogan asked if there were any data on the average energy savings for people who carry out the recommended improvements. **Mr. Ricci-Munn** said that his firm didn't keep that data, but he did note that he personally had realized a 50 percent savings in his heating bill. **Mr. Salmon** said that based on analysis of the tightness of homes after work had been completed, it was estimated that savings of 6 to 12 percent per year on heating bills would be realized. **Ms. Rohrbacher**, citing a similar estimate said projected savings were about \$200 per year, meaning the \$450 average estimate was paid back in just over two years.

Ms. Wheeler asked if there was a time limit on the MassSave program.

Mr. Ricci-Munn said there wasn't, though he observed the program could be pulled at any time. **Mr. Coogan** reminded the audience of the challenge grant from National Grid. "If you're looking to do it, do it in 2017," he said.

Both **Mr. Cook** and **Mr. Ricci-Munn** stressed that while saving money was important, it was even more important to continue to be a green community. Mr. Ricci-Munn noted that some studies say the main driver of carbon emissions is residential energy use.

Ms. Stout-Saunders asked if the inspection looked into the presence of radon in the home. **Mr. Cook** said the energy assessment does not, but that Action through its Healthy Home initiative does address health issues.

Mr. Salmon noted that homeowners are eligible for rebates annually. If a person had a significant amount of work to be done, he or she could spread the job over two years and take advantage of two rebates. **Mr. Marshall** said his firm had done just that with one client who was undertaking \$4,500 worth of work. Half of the work will be done this year and the rest in 2018, he said.

Mr. McGeary, saying his home had been assessed recently, stressed that the program "is not here to sell you stuff." He said that certain actions that would have saved energy would have been too difficult or expensive in his case and were not recommended by the assessors.

Mr. Coogan reminded the audience to visit gloucestergreen.org and to like program's FaceBook page. "Tell your friends and neighbors," he said.

Ms. Wheeler concluded the forum by thanking all who had participated and reminding the audience that the program was being video recorded and would be available on Cape Ann TV at a later date.

The forum ended at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Paul McGeary